DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 275 945 CG 019 477

AUTHOR Bowen, Gary L.
TITLE Spouse Support and the Retention Intentions of Air Force Members: A Basis for Program Development.
PUB DATE Nov 86
NOTE 46p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council on Family Relations (Dearborn, MI, November 3-7, 1986).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Career Change; *Career Choice; Life Satisfaction; *Military Personnel; Morale; Personnel Policy; *Social Support Groups; *Spouses
IDENTIFIERS *Air Force; *Military Reenlistment

ABSTRACT

In recent years, the military services have become interested in developing personnel policies and support programs which enable military personnel to meet military objectives and still maintain a viable personal and family life. A study was undertaken to evaluate the direct and indirect impact of spouse support on the retention intention attitudes of Air Force members and to identify variables associated with spouse support of the member's career. The sample consisted of 270 enlisted men and their wives, 58 officer men and their wives, and 91 enlisted women and their husbands. All subjects had served in the Air Force less than 10 years. A path analysis of interview data from the subjects revealed that spouse support had a signficant and positive effect on the retention intentions of the three respondent groups. The findings suggest that the level of spouse support that members receive in their Air Force careers may be significantly affected by programs and services that enhance the quality of life for families, especially programs and services that foster a positive environment for children, promote parent-child relationship satisfaction, and help couples negotiate a relationship based on partnership and equity. (NB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED275945

Spouse Support and the Retention Intentions of Air Force Members: A Basis for Program Development

Gary L. Bowen

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Gary L. Bowen

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Running head: Spouse Support

CG 019477

The data for this study are part of a larger dataset examining work and family linkages in the United States Air Force, collected under USAF Contracts F33600-79-C-0423 and F33600-81-R-0290. Any opinions, findings, or conclusions expressed in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Air Force.

Paper presented at the National Council on Family Relations Annual Meeting, Research and Theory Section, Dearborn, Michigan, November, 1986.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Abstract

Drawing upon a probability sample of 700 couples (1,400 spouses) in the U.S. Air Force, the present study examines the direct and indirect impacts of spouse support on the retention intentions of enlisted men, officer men, and enlisted women. In addition, exploratory analysis is conducted to identify variables associated with variations in spouse support. Restricting the sample to members with less than ten years of service, spouse support is found to have a significant and positive effect on the retention intentions of the three respondent groups via path analysis. The results are discussed in the context of empirically validating the assumptions for program planning and development that are partially based on the assumed importance of spouse support to the retention intentions of members. Implications are suggested for future research.

Spouse Support and the Retention Intentions of Air Force Members: A Basis for Program Development

Over the last decade, the military services have become increasingly interested in developing personnel policies and support programs which enable military personnel to meet military objectives and requirements and still maintain a viable personal and family life (Bowen, in-press; Hunter, 1982; Kohen, 1984; Military Family Research Center, 1984). Stimulated by a declining manpower pool of new recruits (Faris, 1978; Rimland & Larson, 1981), a substantial increase in the proportion of members with family responsibilities (Armed Services YMCA, 1984; Bowen, 1981), and a general trend toward revaluing personal and family life (Orthner & Bowen, 1982), this interest parallels the growing recognition of the interdependence among personal and family well-being, recruitment and retention, and job satisfaction and productivity (Croan, Katz, Fisher, Smith-Osborne, 1980; Hunter, 1982).

This recognition has provided the impetus for the increasing incorporation of support programs and services for military personnel and their families. At the present time, the military services include a number of agencies and organizations that provide an impressive range of services and programs for military personnel and their families (Military Family Resource Center, 1984; Hunter, 1982). Among these are Family Service/Support Centers, Chaplain Services, Emergency Relief Organizations, Child

Care Services, and Recreational Services. In addition, each service branch has initiated policies and procedures for identifying and handling incidents of child and spouse maltreatment (Bowen, 1984).

Despite the new steps that the military services have taken to intensify their efforts on behalf of service members and their families, there has been a lack of systematic attention to empirically testing the host of assumptions that provide the basis for program development. An overriding assumption has been the perceived importance of spouse support on the retention intentions of member spouses. It is assumed that programs which enhance family life will increase the support that spouses give member spouses to continue their careers in the military. While this link between spouse support and the retention intentions of members seems intuitively obvious, it has not received sufficient empirical testing. Although research does exist that suggests the importance of spouse support to the career intentions and decisions of members (e.g., Grace & Steiner, 1978; Lund, 1978; Orthner & Pittman, 1984; Szoc, 1982), many of these studies have suffered from methodological limitations, including small, often non-representative or narrowly defined samples (e.g., officer members only), and inadequate statistical controls (see Croan et al., 1980 for a review of this literature). In addition, most of these studies have included only member spouses in the sample, operationalizing the independent variable, spouse support, based on the member's perceptions rather than the actual stated support

of the spouse. Past studies have also failed to examine the potential indirect as well as the direct effect of spouse support on the retention intentions of members; the potential interplay between spouse support and other key variables established in the literature, such as job morale and satisfaction with military life, as directly influencing the retention intentions of married members (Mowbray & Scheirer, 1984; Szoc, 1982; Woelfel & Savell, 1978).

In times of financial austerity, management by objectives, and program accountability, it becomes increasingly important to quantify the assumptions that provide the foundation to program development. Only then can the development, continuation, and expansion of programs be based on facts rather than assumptions. This is especially true in the military services where some of the recently developed programs, such as Family Service/Support Centers, are operating on an experimental basis, awaiting evidence that supports the assumptions that provide the basis for their continuation and expansion.

The purpose of this study is twofold: (1) to evaluate the direct and indirect impact of spouse support on the retention intention attitudes of Air Force (AF) members, and (2) to identify variables associated with spouse support of the member's career. In order to address the first objective, a theoretical model was developed based on a review of literature and preliminary data exploration, and is presented in Figure 1. Briefly summarizing with the aid of Figure 1, it was anticipated

that the level of spouse support, job morale, and satisfaction with AF life would each directly and positively affect the retention intention attitudes of three groups of AF members: enlisted men, officer men, and enlisted women.[1] It was also predicted based upon the work of Mowbray and Scheirer (1984) and preliminary data exploration that spouse support and job morale would have indirect and positive effects on the retention intention attitudes of AF members through a direct and positive influence on the satisfaction that AF members experience with AF life. Last, spouse support was predicted to have an indirect and positive effect on the retention intention attitudes of members through a direct and positive impact on their job morale.

This multi-equation path analytic strategy was chosen over a single equation strategy because it allows estimation of direct and indirect effects of spouse support upon retention intention. In contrast, a single equation system only estimates direct effects. Although this path model is one of many possible models, it is based on theoretical predictions and upon relationships documented in the literature. While other models are possible, the model outlined in Figure 1 is both intuitively and theoretically plausible.

Insert Figure 1 About Here

The second objective is largely exploratory with the analysis designed to examine the impact of selected variables on

the level of support that members receive from their spouses. If indeed spouse support is related to the career intentions of members, it is important for military policymakers and program planners to identify correlates of spouse support. Only then can policies and programs be designed that attempt to increase the career commitments of members through increasing the support that spouses give to their member spouse's career. Based on a review of literature and preliminary data exploration, a single equation system was specified and estimated via multiple regression techniques for the sample respondent groups: enlisted men, officer men, and enlisted women.

To date, research investigating correlates of spouse support has been quite limited. In fact, not only has little research been conducted that explores correlates of spouse support, but also those studies that have attempted to identify correlates have operationalized spouse support using the member's perception of the support they receive from their spouses (e.g., Orthner & Pittman, 1984; Szoc, 1982). Still, selected predictors were identified from relevant studies for preliminary testing where relationships had received empirical support. For this reason, it is important to underscore the preliminary nature of the examination of correlates of spouse support; there is a lack of a strong empirical or theoretical basis for including or excluding specific independent variables in the analysis.

Although the present study is not the first comprehensive investigatic examining the correlates of spouse support and its

impact on the retention intentions of members (e.g., Orthner & Pittman, 1984), it significantly expands upon previous efforts in several important ways. First, it is based on a probability sample of 700 AF couples worldwide. The sample for the study provides an opportunity to study the correlates and impacts of spouse support on the retention intentions of three groups of respondents: enlisted men, officer men, and enlisted women. In fact, this is the first study to directly explore the correlates and impacts of spouse support on the retention intentions of enlisted women. Second, since the present sample includes interviews with both husbands and wives from the same marriages, it is possible to model the actual level of support that spouses report giving their member spouse's career rather than relying on the member's perceptions of this support. In preliminary analysis, the former variable was found to be a better predictor of the retention intentions of the members than the latter variable. Finally, this study expands upon prior research that has been limited to studying only the direct effects of spouse support. Both the direct as well as the indirect effects of spouse support on the retention intentions of members is explored in the present analysis.

Method

Source of Data

The analysis for the study was based on a subset of respondents from a probability sample of 700 U.S. AF couples (1,400) persons on nine United States, seven European, and nine

Asian bases. The married men and women were randomly selected at each base from lists of AF personnel supplied by the AF Manpower and Personnel Center.

Since the purposes of the present analysis were to investigate the impact of spouse support on the retention intentions of members, and to identify correlates of spouse support, the sample was restricted to those members who had served less than ten years in the AF. After examining the career commitments of AF members in preliminary analysis, it became clear that the majority of those with ten or more years of service had already committed themselves to an AF career, and levels of spouse support for these members was uniformly and significantly higher than for members with less than ten years of service. This finding is consistent with other research that has found a high correlation between number of years of service and the retention intentions of members (e.g., Allen, 1981; Hiller, 1982). Thus, use of the entire sample would have skewed the findings toward high commitments and would have reduced the statistical variance in both levels of retention intention among members, and the support that spouses give to their AF member spouse's career.

As a result of this restriction, the final sample used in the data analysis included 419 AF couples. This sample included 270 enlisted men couples, 58 officer men couples, and 91 enlisted women couples. Selected demographic characteristics of the three respondent groups are given in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 About Here

Personal interviews were conducted with all participants in the study. Nearly 70% of those contacted agreed to participate, even though both husbands and wives had to agree to separate interviews in order to participate in the study. Each of the semi-structured interviews were conducted in private by professionally trained interviewers.

Measurement of Variables

Four variables were identified and tested in the path analysis model: spouse support (Sp Sup), job morale (Job Mor), satisfaction with AF life (Sat AFL), and retention intention (Ret Int). Table 2 presents the scale ranges, means, standard deviations, and the sample sizes for these estimates for the three respondent groups: enlisted men, officer men, and enlisted women. While both spouse support and satisfaction with AF life are single item variables, job morale and retention intention are scaled measures based on selected items in the questionnaire. The measurement sequence for these variables ran as follows. First, items for these scales were originally selected and designed for including on the questionnaire based on a review of available literature. Second, after the data were collected, the items on each scale were factor analyzed separately for male and female members for the best factor solution. Items that loaded

less than .30 on the AF men and AF women respective scales were dropped from further consideration. Third, the response categories for items on each composite scale were recoded to share a similar range. Fourth, a second factor analysis was conducted on the remaining items on each scale. The items that loaded primarily on the first factor were summed using equal weights to form each scale, and the reliability of the scales was assessed by using Cronbach's alpha (1951). Table 3 gives the results of the factor analysis for both retention intention and job morale for both AF men and women, including the respective items, factor loadings, and reliability coefficients.[2]

Insert Table 2 About Here

It is important to reiterate that the measure of spouse support was based on the actual support that spouses reported they gave their member spouse's career. Although the members were asked about the level of support for their careers that they perceived from their spouses, in exploratory analysis, the actual level of support as reported by the spouses of members themselves was found to be a better predictor of the retention intention of members. As a consequence, this measure was used in the analysis.

Insert Table 3 About Here

Ten additional variables were used in the regression analysis of spouse support. The name and range of these variables are defined in Table 4. Three of the ten variables were scaled from questionnaire items using the identical factor analysis strategy as outlined above: sex role, social network, and marital satisfaction. The measure of sex-role was determined by an 11-item Likert-type scale with five response categories ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. In prior efforts, each of the items used in this scale had been shown to be a valid and reliable indicator of the sex-role attitudes of husbands and wives (Bowen & Orthner, 1983; Scanzoni, 1975; Tomeh, 1978). These items are all short statements expressing either a "traditional" or "modern" sex role preference. Traditional preferences suggest that a woman's primary purpose is to be responsible for household and child-care tasks, subordinating her own interests for the well-being of the family, the husband in particular. Within marriage, traditionalists assign to men the role of household head and the primary responsibility for making major decisions. Modern preferences, on the other hand, stress equality between the sexes, each spouse having the right to pursue the benefits relative to the occupational system. Within marriage, household and child-care responsibilities become interchangeable. The overall reliability coefficient for this scale was .66 for husbands and .70 for wives.

Insert Table 4 About Here

The measure of social network consisted of four items that asked sample respondents about their degree of closeness to parents, parents-in-law, friends, and other relatives. Response categories for each item ranged from very close to not close. Determined by Cronbach's alpha, the reliability of the scale was moderately high, alpha equal to .67 for husbands and .59 for wives.

The six items making up the marital satisfaction scale came from the previous work of Spanier (1976), a subscale of the dyadic adjustment scale. These items focus on the couple's overall satisfaction with the quality of marital interaction, the frequency of disagreements, the couple's ability to resolve disagreements when they occur, and the frequency with which divorce or separation is considered. For all six items as a whole, alpha was equal to .74 for husbands and .77 for wives.

The remaining variables used in the multiple regression analysis on spouse support were single item measures. With the exception of one variable, these remaining variables were measured on at least an interval level. The presence of children was coded as a dummy variable in the analysis (0=no children; 1=children).

Data Analysis and Results

The Path Models: Retention Intention

To test the model shown in Figure 1, a path analysis procedure was run separately on the model for the three respondent groups: enlisted men, officer men, and enlisted women. The analysis procedure implemented was designed to yield the most parsimonious possible path models, assuming a linear, additive, recursive system (Land, 1969). Based on initial findings, the models were trimmed (Heise, 1969), and the analysis repeated on the trimmed models.

The direct effects of all independent variables on each dependent variable were calculated using multiple regression equations and the forward step-wise multiple regression program in SPSSX (SPSS, Inc., 1983). To avoid losing cases in the analysis because of missing data on one or more variables, a pairwise deletion of missing data was used, rather than listwise. In the first stage, the direct effects of spouse support, job morale, and satisfaction with Air Force life on retention intention were calculated for the three respondent groups. In the second stage, the direct effects of spouse support and job morale were assessed on the dependent variable, satisfaction with AF life. In the last stage, the direct effect of spouse support on job morale was calculated.[3] In the path analysis, spouse support was defined as an exogenous variable. Table 5 shows the correlation coefficients (r), unstandardized regression

coefficients (b), and standardized beta's (p) of the variables in the models for the three respondent groups.[4]

Insert Table 5 About Here

Based on these results, the theorized models for enlisted men, officer men, and enlisted women were trimmed and multiple regressions were recomputed, deleting variables which failed to reach statistical significance ($p > .05$). The squared multiple correlations of the trimmed models were subsequently compared to those of the originally theorized models. The fit of the trimmed models to the data was seen as satisfactory when the difference between the R-squares was not statistically significant ($p < .05$). In each comparison, the R-square change from the theorized to the trimmed model indicated that the latter model fitted well with the data.

Figure 2 shows the path diagrams resulting from the multiple regression analyses of the trimmed versions of the model for the three respondent groups: enlisted men, officer men, and enlisted women. In these diagrams, each arrow represents a significant regression coefficient ($p < .01$). The numeric standardized beta coefficients (p) corresponding to the arrows are also listed in Figure 2, as well as the unstandardized regression coefficients (b).

Insert Figure 2 About Here

A major result to note in these analyses is the strength of the R^2 coefficients for each model, which indicates the percentage of variance in the retention intentions of members accounted for by the independent variables in that equation (see Table 6). The R^2 coefficients are .56 for officer men, .35 for enlisted men, and .46 for enlisted women. Each coefficient is well above the R^2 of .20 to .30 considered meaningful for this type of cross-sectional analysis.

As expected, spouse support had a positive direct effect on the retention intentions of the three respondent groups, especially enlisted women. In addition, spouse support was found to have an indirect effect on the retention intentions of enlisted men through a positive and direct effect on their satisfaction with AF life. Although spouse support was found to have a direct and positive effect on the satisfaction that enlisted women experience with AF life, contrary to expectation, spouse support did not have any indirect effect on the retention intentions of either enlisted women or officer men through satisfaction with AF life. In fact, spouse support was found to have no significant effect on the satisfaction that officer men experience with AF life. However, as predicted, a positive and significant relationship did exist for officer men between satisfaction with AF life and retention intention. Despite

expectations, the level of spouse support that members receive was also not found to be indirectly related to retention intention through job morale. In fact, contrary to expectation, spouse support was not significantly associated with the job morale of members.

Although a direct and positive relationship had been predicted between job morale and retention intentions of members, this relationship received support only among enlisted women, where it was the strongest direct predictor of retention intentions. This finding for men fails to support past research where job satisfaction has been found to have a strong direct effect on retention intentions (Szoc, 1982; Walters & Roach, 1973; Woelfel & Savell, 1976). However, as predicted, a positive and direct relationship was found between job morale and satisfaction with AF life for the three respondent groups. Since satisfaction with AF life was a positive and direct influencer on the retention intentions of enlisted and officer men, job morale had an indirect effect on the retention intentions of AF men. In sum, it appears that while spouse support and satisfaction with AF life are the two most important predictors of those modeled on the retention intentions of AF men, the retention intentions of AF enlisted women are relatively unaffected by their satisfaction with AF life. Although, like AF men, spouse support is found to be an important predictor of the retention intentions of enlisted women, unlike AF men, their job morale rather than their satisfaction with AF life has a significant and direct impact on

their feelings about a career in the AF. These findings suggest that the retention intentions of men may be more affected by a focus on improving the quality of AF life, while a focus on improving job morale may have more dividends on increasing the retention intentions of enlisted women.

The results just discussed can be translated into expected effects on the overall probability of retention intention for the three groups, using the unstandardized "b" coefficients, and recalling that a change of one unit on a five-point scale of retention intention represents a 20% increase in retention intention attitudes. Table 6 presents the percentage changes expected in the retention intention attitudes of members for each one-unit increase in the independent variables listed.[5]

Insert Table 6 About Here

As seen in Table 6, the effects of the independent variables on the retention intentions of members varied by respondent group. For AF men, the largest overall effects on retention intention were shown by their satisfaction with AF life. Each unit increase on the six-point satisfaction with AF life item translates to a retention intention increase of 10% for enlisted men and 12.20% for officer men. For enlisted women, job morale had the largest overall effect on retention intention. Each unit increase on the five-point job morale scale adds 13.20% to the retention intention proportion.

The overall impact of spouse support on retention intentions was quite similar for the three respondent groups. Overall, each unit increase on the four-point spouse support variable is associated with a retention intention increase of 8.78% for enlisted men, 7.40% for officer men, and 8.40% for enlisted women. Although spouse support was not the most influential variable on the retention intentions of AF members among those tested, its potential influence on the career decisions of AF men and women was not trivial. This finding provides additional support for an important program development assumption in the military: the important influence that spouse support has on the retention intentions of members.

Multiple Regression Results: Spouse Support

Given the relationship between spouse support and the retention intentions of members, it seemed important for program reasons to better understand the variation in spouse support among the three respondent groups. Using a step-wise multiple regression procedure, a series of exploratory regressions were run for each respondent group in an attempt to identify variables associated with spouse support. The independent variables selected for these exploratory analyses were selected based upon relationships shown in the literature, and the researcher's intuition about variables plausibly linked to spouse support. The analysis was conducted in two stages. In the first stage, a number of variables were explored for each respondent group as potential independent variables. Based on these results, the

regression models were trimmed of variables with standardized regression coefficients less than ±.10. Beta coefficients ±.10 became the criterion selected to trim the models since neither too many nor too few variables were eliminated which were thought to be important in the models.[6] Step-wise multiple regressions were then re-computed without the variables which had the least powerful effects on spouse support. Results of this second stage analysis are shown in Table 7.

Insert Table 7 About Here

Spouse support for enlisted men. Although the four variables entered into the model all achieved statistical significance ($p < .01$), the date of the husband's entry ($\beta = -.21$) and the wife feelings about the AF as a place to rear children ($\beta = .22$) were the best predictors of spouse support among those tested for the wives of enlisted men. Not surprisingly, the support of spouses among enlisted members increases the longer they remain in the service, perhaps a function of a selection process where members with lower spouse support leave the service. In addition, wives who feel that the Air Force is a good place to rear children were more supportive of their husband's career than those who felt less sure of the AF environment for rearing children.

Two additional variables were also important in predicting the support that wives of enlisted men give to their husband's

career: number of hours that the husband works per week (β=.16) and wife's parent-child relationship satisfaction (β=.15). Contrary to expectations, the results suggested that the more hours husbands work per week, the greater the spouse support they receive for their careers. It may be that hours worked per week is an indicator of job morale which may have positive spillover on family life satisfaction. Although the number of hours worked per week has been related to job morale in past research, weak support exists for a relationship between job morale and family life satisfaction (Woelfel & Savell, 1978). It was also found that the more wives were satisfied with their parent-child relationship, the greater their support. Without doubt, these findings underline the importance of the mother-child relationship and her perception toward the AF community as a place to rear her children as instrumental to her support of her enlisted husband's career. Unlike husband's date of entry and work hours, these are also variables that can be directly affected by programs designed to create a better atmosphere for family life. Despite these findings, the four variables in the equation explained only 16% of the variance in spouse support, somewhat below the R^2 of .20 to .30 considered substantial for cross-sectional analysis.

Spouse support for officer men. Although seven variables were entered into the regression on predicting the spouse support of officer men, only one variable achieved statistical significance ($p < .05$): the wife's perception toward the AF as

an environment to rear children. Similar to the finding for spouse support for the careers of enlisted men, the wives of officers who perceive the AF as a good place to rear children were more supportive of their husband's AF career (β=.36). The combined effect of all variables entered into the equation was the explanation of 29% of the variance in spouse support; however, R^2 was not statistically significant at the .05 level. Compared to enlisted men, the sample for officer men was more limited (66 compared to 242 enlisted men marriages).

Spouse support for enlisted women. Overall, we were able to explain 66% of the variance in the support that men give their enlisted spouses in their career ($p < .01$). Of the six variables entered into the equation, four were significant at the .05 level of significance or better. By far, the best predictor of husband's support for the career of his member spouse was his own positive feelings about pursuing an AF career (β=.50). This finding was contrary to expectation where it had been expected that competition between spouses may emerge when both are in the service and the husband is career oriented. The traditional importance of the spouse to the career advancement of the man had historically been in the role of an emotional supporter, family caretaker, and community hostess than in the role of a fellow military member with her own commitant career demands. This finding tends to suggest that husbands and wives who are both military members may be learning to negotiate a relationship where they are co-providers in the marital relationship. It will

be important to further explore this relationship in future research as well as investigate an emerging type of AF couple: AF member women with civilian husbands.

Not surprising, the second most important predictor of husband's support was his sex-role attitudes (β=-.40). Husbands who stressed equity between the sexes and the sharing of household and child-care responsibilities were more supportive of their wife's career than husbands who assigned men the traditional role of household head and the primary agent in making major decisions. In addition, it was found that husbands who were more satisfied with their parent-child relationship voiced greater support for their wife's career. It is likely that men who feel secure in their relationship with their children are more willing to perform the tasks involved in providing for the physical and emotional care of children. As a consequence, they would find their wife's career less disruptive to the pattern of household and child care responsibilities. However, it was found that the husband's support of his wife's career decreased the more the wife's career caused her to be away from home overnight (β=-.19). Even "modern" men may have limits to what they are willing to tolerate and still support the careers of their wives. This finding clearly suggest that the support of the husband declines the more frequent the wife is away from home overnight.

Conclusions

A central objective of this study was to examine the impact of spouse support on the retention intentions of AF members. It was hypothesized that spouse support would have both a positive direct as well as an indirect impact on the retention intentions of enlisted men, officer men, and enlisted women. Results of the study provide partial support for this prediction. Although spouse support was found to directly effect the retention intentions of the three respondent groups, its indirect effects on retention intention were limited to enlisted men. As predicted, in the case of enlisted men, spouse support indirectly affected the retention intentions of members through increasing their satisfaction with AF life.

Although not a primary focus of the present investigation, a significant finding for military policymakers is the demonstrated importance of job morale to the retention intentions of enlisted women. Contrary to past research, no significant relationship was found between the level of job morale and the retention intentions of AF men, either enlisted or officer. This finding suggests that the opportunities and experiences that members have in their AF jobs may be more instrumental to their career decisions of women than to the career decisions of men. In fact, the findings indicate that the best predictor of the retention intentions of men among those tested is their satisfaction with AF life. The retention intentions of enlisted and officer men positively covaried with their satisfaction with AF life. There

was no significant relationship between the satisfaction of enlisted women with Af life and their retention intentions. It may be that the military lifestyle looms larger for men than for women as a factor in influencing their feelings about a career in the AF.

A second objective of the study was to identify selected correlates that influence the level of support that spouses give their member spouses to continue in their AF careers. Although exploratory, the results suggest the central importance that child-related variables have on the support that spouses give their member spouses to continue their AF careers. Among the significant findings, it was also found that the level of support that husbands report for their member wife's career is also influenced by his own plans to remain in the AF, as well as an attitude that stresses an equal partnership in marriage between spouses in family and work roles. Taken together, these findings suggest that the level of spouse support that members receive in their AF careers may be significantly affected by programs and services that enhance the quality of life for families, especially programs and services that foster a positive environment for children, promote parent-child relationship satisfaction, and help couples negotiate a relationship based on partnership and equity.

It is suggested that further research expand the present analysis to other service branches, as well as examine the impact of spouse support on the retention intentions of members,

controlling for other variables which have been demonstrated in the literature to effect the career intentions of members, such as pay and bonuses, promotion probabilities, characteristics of the member's geographic assignment, indicators of economic strength in the civilian economy, and individual and family characteristics (Scheirer, 1984). It will also be important to reexamine the present findings for individuals at different points in the career ladder. In addition, given the importance of child-related variables to the level of spouse support, an inviting analysis will be to investigate variations in spouse support at different intersections of the career and family life cycle.

In the present analysis, the sample sizes for officer men and enlisted women were quite limited. It is hoped that future studies can employ larger samples to increase the confidence in findings, including officer as well as enlisted women in the analysis. Unfortunately, the present sample included too few officer women to conduct a separate analysis. In addition, the present samples for enlisted men and enlisted women included a high proportion of dual military couples, 26% and 97%, respectively. With larger samples, it will be possible to separately analyze variations in spouse support and its impact on the retention intentions for members with member as well as civilian spouses. To date, little is known about couples with a military member wife and a civilian husband.

Although the retention intentions of members served as the dependent variable in the first analysis, further research needs to explore the relationship bet een retention intentions and actual career decisions. The bottom line for military leadership is results. In the present case, results translate to retention behavior, not merely intentions. For support programs in the military to continue to evolve, programs must be empirically demonstrated to have their intended benefits not only for members and their families, but also have positive outcomes for the military organization. Otherwise an attitude may develop among military leadership that recognizes yet negates the traditional importance assigned to the military family and the development of support programs on their behalf.

References

Allen, J.P. (1981). Military, biographical and demographic correlates of Army career intentions. Alexandria, VA: U.S. Army Research Institute.

Armed Services YMCA (1984). American military families: Basic demographics. Springfield, VA: Military Family Resources Center.

Bowen, G.L. (1981). Family patterns of U.S. military personnel. In J.S. Parry & K.L. Parkinson (Eds.), Proceedings of the National Association of Social Work Services for Military Families. Springfield, VA: Military Family Resource Center.

Bowen, G.L. (1984). The evolvement of family advocacy programs in the American military: A status report. Armed Forces and Society, 10, 583-596.

Bowen, G.L. (in-press). Families in blue: Insights from Air Force families. Social Casework.

Bowen, G.L. & Orthner, D.K. (1983). Sex-role congruency and marital quality. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 45, 223-230.

Croan, G.M., Katz, R., Fischer, N., & Smith-Osborne, A. (1980). Roadmap for Navy family research. Arlington, VA: Office of Naval Research.

Faris, J. (1978). The all-volunteer force: Recruitment from military families. Armed Forces and Society, 7, 545-559.

Grace, G.L., & Steiner, M.B. (1978). Wives attitudes and the retention of Navy enlisted personnel. In E.J. Hunter & D.S. Nice (Eds.), Military families: Adaptation to change (42-54). New York: Praeger.

Heise, D.R. (1969). Problems in path analysis and causal inference. In E.F. Borgatta (Ed.), Sociological methodology (pp. 3-27). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Hiller, J. (1982). Analysis of second-term reenlistment behavior (R-2884-MRAL). Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corp.

Hunter, E.J. (1982). Families under the flag. New York: Praeger.

Kohen, J.A. (1984). The military career is a family affair. Journal of Family Issues, 5, 401-418.

Land, K.C. (1969). Principles of path analysis. In E.F. Borgatta (Ed.), Sociological methodology (pp. 3-37). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Lund, D.A. (1978). Junior officer retention in the modern volunteer Army: Who leaves and who stays? In E.J. Hunter & D.S. Nice (Eds.), Military families: Adaptations to change (32-41). New York: Praeger.

Military Family Resource Center (1984). Review of military family research and literature. Springfield, VA: Military Family Resource Center.

Mowbray, E., & Scheirer, M.A. (1984). The influence of location on the reenlistment of Army enlisted personnel. (Contract No. MDA903-81-C=0227). Rockville, MD: Westat, Inc.

Orthner, D.K., & Bowen, G.L. (1982). Families in blue. Greensboro, NC: Family Development Press.

Orthner, D.K., & Pittman, J.F. (1984, October). Family contributions to work commitment. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Council on Family Relations, San Francisco, CA.

Rimland, B., & Larson, G.E. (1981). The manpower quality decline. Armed Forces and Society, 8, 21-78.

Scheirer, M.A. (1984). Variables influencing the reenlistment of Army enlisted personnel: A critical review (Contract No. MDA903-81-C-0227). Rockville, MD: Westat, Inc.

SPSS, Inc. (1983). SPSSX. New York: McGraw Hill Book Company.

Szoc, R. (1982). Family factors critical to the retention of Naval personnel. Columbia, MD: Westinghouse Public Applied Systems.

Waters, L., & Roach, D. (1973). Job attitudes as predictors of termination and absenteeism: Consistency over time and across organization units. Journal of Applied Psychology, 57, 341-342.

Woelfel, J.C., & Savell, J.M. (1978). Marital satisfaction, job satisfaction, and retention in the Army. In E.J. Hunter & D.S. Nice (Eds.), Military families: Adaptations to change (17-31). New York: Praeger.

Footnotes

[1]Each of these variables has been demonstrated in prior research to have a direct impact of the retention intentions of members (e.g., Mowbray & Scheirer, 1984; Orthner & Pittman, 1984; Szoc, 1982; Woelfel & Savell, 1978).

[2]The type of factor analysis used is what Nie, Bent, and Hull (1970:220) refer to as: "The most universally accepted factor method" or "principle factoring with iteration." The following program options were in effect: varimax rotation, pairwise deletion of missing data, maximum number of factors specified=unspecified, minimum eigen value=1.0, maximum number of iterations: 25.

[3]The following equations were used to estimate the direct effects on each dependent variable for the three respondent groups:

$$X_2 = p_{21}X_1 + p_2u_2u_2$$

$$X_3 = p_{31}X_1 + p_{32}X_2 + p_3u_3u_3$$

$$X_4 = p_{41}X_1 + p_{42}X_2 + p_{43}X_3 + p_4u_4u_4$$

[4]Two types of coefficients are shown in Table 5, unstandardized and standardized. Unstandardized multiple regression coefficients (b) are interpreted as the extent of change in the dependent variable expected from a one-unit change in the independent or predictor variable. For example, an unstandardized beta of .34 between spouse support and the retention intention of enlisted men means that an increase of one point in the score for spouse support (Range=4) will produce an

increase in retention intention equal to .34 (where the range of retention intention is 5). Since retention intention is a 5-value scale, a "b" coefficient of 1.00 represents a 20% increase in retention intention. On the other hand, standardized multiple regression coefficients (p) are a unit-free indicator of the strength of effect for each independent or predictor variable. Since standardized weights are computed from data that have been transformed so that all variables have the same mean and standard deviation ($\bar{x}$=0; S.D.=1), the larger the regression weight, the larger the effect of the predictor. More precisely, the beta coefficients (p) indicate the average standard deviation change in the dependent variable associated with a change of one standard deviation in the independent variable. For example, the standardized coefficient between spouse support and the retention intention of enlisted men in Table 2 is equal to .32. It is interpreted as when there is an increase in the predictor variable, spouse support, of one standard deviation, one may expect a corresponding increase in the criterion variable, retention intention, of approximately one-third of a standard deviation.

[5]The "direct effects" are calculated by multiplying the "b" coefficient by 20%. The "indirect effects" are calculated by multiplying the respective coefficient for satisfaction with AF life on retention intention with the coefficient for the relevant independent variable on satisfaction with AF life, times 20%.

Each "total effect" is the sum of the direct and indirect effects.

[6]Among the variables included in the first stage analyses, but later trimmed because of standardized regression coefficients less than $\pm$.10 were the job morale of members, pattern of household and child care labor allocation between husband and wife, and the frequency that the duty hours of the member changes.

Figure 1. Theoretical model of the relationship between spouse support and retention intention.

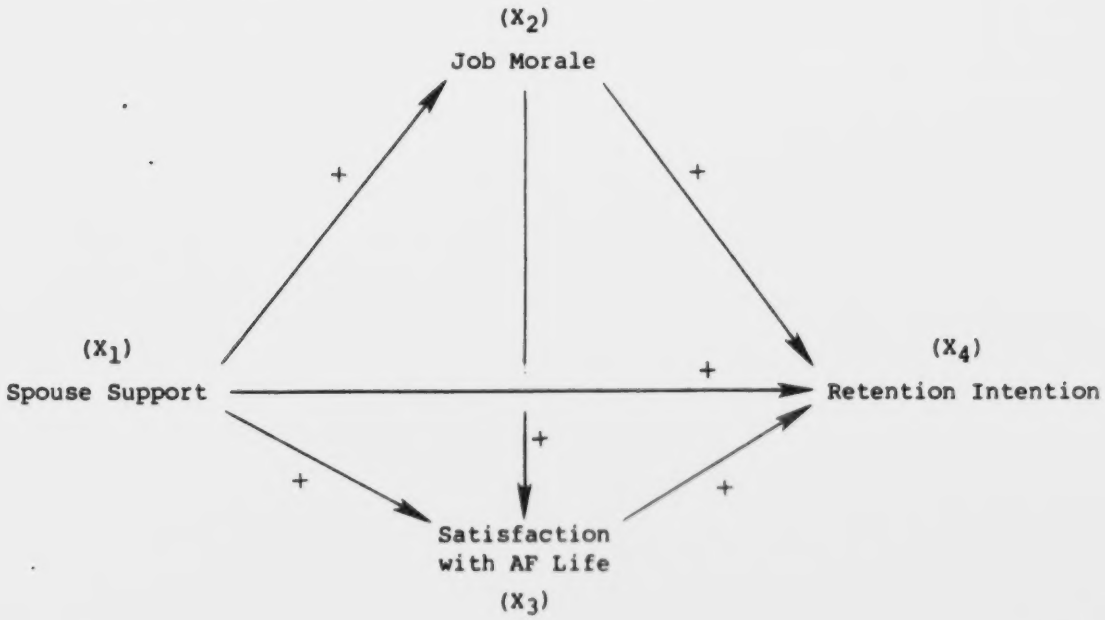


Table 1

Demographic Profile of Sample Members

Characteristic	Enlisted Men	Officer Men	Enlisted Women
Mean age	26.08	30.36	25.59
Mean years of education	12.82	17.16	12.67
Rank			
E1-E3	20		44
E4-E6	80		56
O1-O3		94	
O4		6	
Percent with children at home	67	66	51
Race			
Percent white	83	90	77
Percent black	13	8	5
Percent other	4	2	19
Percent with AF member spouse	26	8	97

Table 2

Definition of Variables

Name	Variable Definition	Range	Sample Group	Mean	Standard Deviation	N
Ret Int	Retention Intention	0 (definitely not)- 4 (yes, definitely)	Enlisted men	1.99	1.23	269
			Officer men	2.37	1.11	57
			Enlisted women	1.74	1.22	90
Job Mor	Job Morale	0 (very dissatisfied)- 4 (very satisfied)	Enlisted men	2.52	.89	269
			Officer men	2.57	1.28	57
			Enlisted women	2.50	.87	90
Sat AFL	Satisfaction with Air Force Life	0 (very dissatisfied)- 5 (very satisfied)	Enlisted men	3.52	1.02	269
			Officer men	3.59	.99	57
			Enlisted women	3.74	.97	89
Sp Sup	Spouse Support for Career	0 (very little extent)- 3 (great extent)	Enlisted men	1.98	1.17	244
			Officer men	2.05	1.09	49
			Enlisted women	1.61	1.25	67

Table 3

Factor Analysis of the Composite Scales

Scale	Items	First Factor Loading		Reliability Coefficient*	
		AF Men	AF Women	AF Men	AF Women
Retention Intention (Ret Int)	Feelings about AF career	.47	.49		
	Plan to pursue or continue career	.92	.99	.70	.71
	Total years plan to serve	.68	.63		
Job Morale (Job Mor)	Enjoys performing day-to-day responsibilities	.74	.79		
	Gains sense of accomplishment from job	.59	.56		
	Interests match AF speciality	.59	.72	.85	.82
	Importance of AF job	.48	.29		
	Interest in AF job	.76	.70		
	Satisfaction with job	.38	.39		

*Cronbach's (1951) alpha coefficient.

Table 4

Definition of Additional Variables for Step-Wise Regression on Spouse Support

Name	Range
Date of husband's entry	(19) 71-81
AF good environment for rearing children	0 (yes)-2 (no)
Number of hours worked per week	0-
Parent-child relationship satisfaction	0 (very satisfied)-4 (very dissatisfied)
Sex role**	0 (modern)-4 (traditional)
Number of TDY assignments last year	0-
Frequency of extra duty	0 (never)-3 (often)
Presence of children*	0 (absent)-1 (present)
Social network**	0 (very close)-3 (not close)
Marital satisfaction**	0 (very satisfied)-4 (very dissatisfied)

*Dummy variable

**Scale

Table 5

Correlation Coefficients, Unstandardized Regression Coefficients, and Standardized Coefficients

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable: Job Morale			Satisfaction with AF Life			Retention Intention		
	Enlisted Men	Officer Men	Enlisted Women	Enlisted Men	Officer Men	Enlisted Women	Enlisted Men	Officer Men	Enlisted Women
Spouse Support for Career	.06[a]	.20	.15	.34	.32	.54	.45	.54	.50
	.05[b]	.24	.10	.28**	.21	.37**	.34**	.37**	.49**
	.06[c]	.20	.15	.32	.23	.48	.32	.36	.50
Job Morale				.35	.53	.49	.25	.33	.54
				.38**	.38**	.46**	.13	-.04	.76**
				.33	.49	.42	.10	-.05	.54
Satisfaction with Air Force Life							.52	.66	.37
							.46**	.64**	-.20
							.38	.57	-.16
Constant	2.43	2.08	2.34	2.01	2.19	1.98	-.61	-.57	-.19
R^2	.00	.04	.02	.22**	.33**	.46**	.36**	.56**	.48**
N	242	48	66	242	48	65	242	48	65

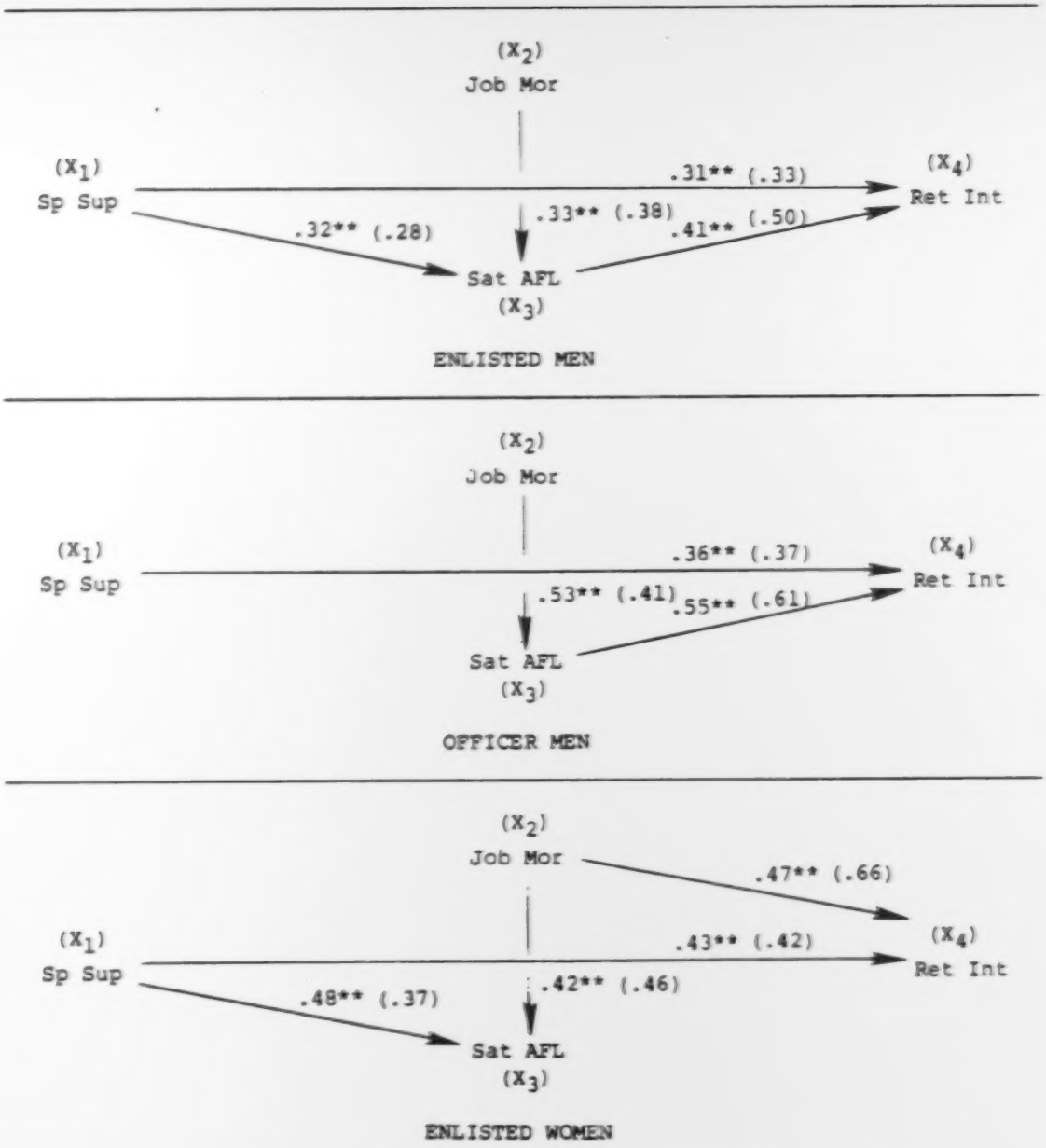
[a]Correlation Coefficient (r)

[b]Unstandardized Regression Coefficient (b)

[c]Standardized Beta (p)

** $p < .01$

Figure 2. Trimmed path diagram of variables affecting retention intention by respondent group.



Note: Standardized coefficients (p) are followed by unstandardized coefficients in parenthesis.

** $p < .01$

Table 6

Changes in Retention Intention Derived from Spouse Support, Satisfaction with Air Force Life, and Job Morale: Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects

Independent Variables	Direct Effect %	Indirect Effect Through Satisfaction with AF Life %	Total Effects %
Spouse Support for Careers			
Enlisted men	6.60 (b=.33)	2.18	8.78
Officer men	7.40 (b=.37)		7.40
Enlisted Women	8.40 (b=.42)		8.40
Job Morale			
Enlisted men	-	3.80	3.80
Officer men	-	5.00	5.00
Enlisted women	13.20 (b=.66)		13.20
Satisfaction with AF Life			
Enlisted men	10.00 (b=.50)		10.00
Officer men	12.20 (b=.61)		12.20
Enlisted women	-		-
R^2 (Restricted Models)			
Enlisted men	35.26**		
Officer men	55.57**		
Enlisted women	46.44**		

** $p < .01$

Table 7

Step-Wise Regression of Selected Independent Variables on Spouse Support for Career: Enlisted Men, Officer Men, Enlisted Women

	Multiple R	R^2	b	Beta(β)
Spouse Support for Enlisted Men				
Date of husband's entry	.26	.07	-.08**	-.21**
AF good child rearing environment-wife	.33	.11	.19**	.22**
Number hours husband works per week	.37	.14	.20**	.16**
Wife's parent-child relationship satisfaction	.40**	.16**	.24**	.15**
Spouse Support for Officer Men				
Presence of children	.34	.11	.46	.20
AF good child rearing environment-wife	.39	.15	.55**	.36**
Number of nights husband away on TDY assignment last year	.47	.22	.52	.18
Wife's social network	.49	.24	-.30	-.20
Date of husband's entry	.51	.26	-.58	-.13
Wife's marital satisfaction	.52	.27	-.65	-.15
Wife's parent-child relationship satisfaction	.54	.29	.21	.14
Spouse Support for Enlisted Women				
Husband's AF retention intention	.65	.42	.51**	.50**
Husband's sex role	.73	.53	-1.12**	-.40**
Husband's satisfaction with Air Force life	.76	.57	.26	.19
Husband's parent-child relationship satisfaction	.78	.60	.30*	.20*
Number of nights wife away on TDY assignment last year	.80	.64	-.01*	-.19*
Frequency of wife's extra duty	.81**	.66**	-.21	-.14

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$